

# PRESS RELEASE

## Congressman John Conyers, Jr.

Fourteenth District, Michigan  
Ranking Member, Committee on the Judiciary  
Dean, Congressional Black Caucus

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CONTACT:  
Dena Graziano: (202) 225-6504

### CONYERS SAYS NEY-HOYER ISN'T HALF A LOAF IT ACTUALLY WEAKENS CURRENT LAW

Congressman John Conyers, Jr. Ranking Member of the House Judiciary Committee issued the following statement regarding today's Judiciary Committee Hearing on H.R. 3295 the "Help America Vote Act":

"I believe election reform is the most important civil rights issue of the Congress. While the electoral problems of today may lack the stark drama of Bull Connor's police dogs, literacy tests and poll taxes, the effect is the same. African-Americans in Florida were ten times more likely to have their ballots discarded. A non-partisan study issued by Caltech and MIT in July 2001, showed that while over 100 million Americans went to the polls on election day last year, "...as many as 6 million might just have well have spent the day fishing" because their ballots were discarded by faulty machines.

Because this Committee, not the House Administration Committee, has jurisdiction over constitutional questions and matters relating to civil rights, it is altogether appropriate that we address this important issue. I wrote a bill with Senator Chris Dodd, the "Equal Protection of Voting Rights Act" that was referred to this Committee. It now has 218 sponsors in the House and Senate, more than any other bill in Congress.

When the bill was introduced, so-called Washington wise men, like David Broder of the *Washington Post*, echoed the conventional wisdom that a bill that imposed minimum standards of the states could not pass the House. Months later, there are two bills that have minimum standards that are imposed on the states, the Ney-Hoyer bill and the Conyers-Dodd bill.

Now, the same Washington wise men are asking me why I so strongly oppose the Ney-Hoyer bill. They make the argument that we should take half a loaf instead of none.

What's the problem with that?

First, this bill isn't half a loaf – it actually takes away some of the few crumbs we have been able to get over the last few decades. The bill weakens current law – it weakens Motor Voter and the Americans with Disabilities Act. It is not just me saying that, it is all of the civil rights groups, the disability rights groups, organized labor and the nonpartisan League of Women Voters.

Second, the bill leaves language minorities and individuals with disabilities at the back of the bus. There are no standards that would ensure access for language minorities and the standards for individuals with disabilities are loophole ridden.

Third, all of the standards in the bill are unenforceable because the bill allows states to grade themselves on whether they have met them. This is like putting the fox in charge of the hen house.

Fourth, there is NO requirement in the bill that every voter have the right to vote on a machine that warns voters of mistakes and gives a second chance to correct them. Nothing would stop as state from getting brand new machines for wealthy precincts and continuing to reserve the most disenfranchising machines for poor and minority neighborhoods.

This bill does not fix the problems that were revealed in Florida and across the nation, it codifies it. This bill does not enhance existing civil rights laws, it weakens them. This bill does not do away with punchcards and dimpled chads in poor and minority neighborhoods.

But there is hope. If you read Congress Daily today, my Senate cosponsor, Chris Dodd, and the Senator from Missouri, Kit Bond, are very close to an agreement on a bill that I can support. It is my sincerest hope that the members of this Committee can come together to protect our historic jurisdiction over voting rights and fix this House Administration bill before it reaches the House floor.